Alabama Chess Antics

The Official Publication of the Alabama Chess Federation

Fall 2020

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Halloween chess hosted outdoors by the Madison City Chess League—featuring costumes, masks, and hand sanitizer! (Photo by Scott Wilhelm.)

Greetings from the Editor

Hi folks! At long last, I present to you the Fall 2020 *Antics*.

It is already December, but the cover story of this *Antics* has gotten me back into the Halloween spirit. Many thanks to **Ranae Bartlett** for her report on the MCCL's Halloween Chess Tournament. The MCCL's photographer, **Scott Wilhelm**, has deservedly won the Photo of the Quarter award for his outstanding "King vs. Queen" cover photo. Results and further photos from this unique event may be found in this issue.

In other news, various Alabama state championship events, including the main **2020 Alabama State Championship**, have taken place. I give a full report on my own State Championship experience, followed by a summary of all the recent championship results.

Finally, by sheer happenstance, we have *two* articles about openings named after animals. **Charles Anthony** discusses how to defeat the Sicilian Dragon, and **Doug Strout** presents his own pet defense, the "English Horned Frog." Gentlemen, thank you once again for your many entertaining contributions to the *Antics*.

Let it be known that some in-person tournaments will be taking place in Alabama in the coming months. See page 23 of this *Antics* for a list of these tournaments. COVID precautions will be in place; players should take note of any special pandemic-related rules stated on tournament fliers.

The deadline for submissions for the Winter 2021 issue of the *Antics* is March 15. Submit photos, games, and articles via **Alabama.Chess.Editor@gmail.com**. Games in .pgn format are strongly preferred.

-Scott Varagona

ACF Membership

Any individual may become a **Regular Member** upon the payment of annual dues of **$15.00**. Regular members may enter ACF tournaments and receive special publications or notices from ACF as they are issued. Any chess club seeking to become an **Affiliate** is required to file the Affiliate Information Form with the Secretary of the ACF and pay annual dues of **$35.00**. Benefits of becoming an affiliate include the right to bid to host ACF-sanctioned events, such as the Alabama State Championship, and to receive advertising through the ACF for your tournaments.

Alabama Chess Leaderboard

Top 50 Ratings (retrieved from uschess.org on 12/14/2020)

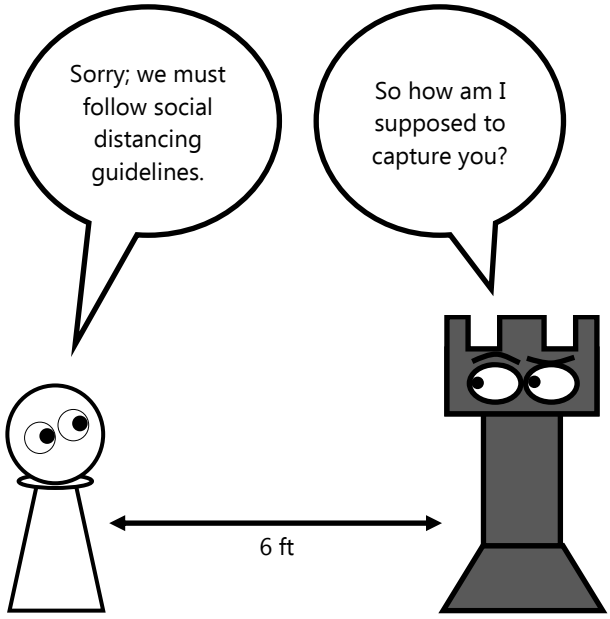
Only players with rating activity within the past year are listed.

1	YURY A BARNAKOV	2283	26	XAVIER BRUNI	1808
2	SCOTT VARAGONA	2270	27	SARVAGNA VELIDANDLA	1802
3	BILL MELVIN	2200	28	PATRICK DOWD	1786
4	GERALD A LARSON	2133	29	RHODES PEELE	1770
5	CHIBUZO C ILONZE	2103	30	VIKHRAM BALAGEE	1761
6	JONATHAN RASBERRY	2098	31	KEN D KIRBY	1733
7	AARON DECORD	2097	32	KENNETH SLOAN	1712
8	BRENT INMAN	2095	33	ALADDIN S LATEEF	1707
9	CHARLES L MEIDINGER	2067	34	LOUIS S DE FIORE	1700
10	TEJAS V THORAT	2066	35	JAMES R GRIFFIN	1697
11	ZACHARY SNOW II	2032	36	WILLIE J SANDIFER	1677
12	MICHAEL W PORCELLI	2012	37	GABRIEL T NOLAND	1654
13	WILLIAM D FOX	2012	38	NATHANIEL B TILLMAN	1634
14	FARUK E ERGIN	1992	39	SHERWOOD DONG	1611
15	JAMES R LINHOLM	1978	40	WILLIAM R SAVOIE	1609
16	OM BADHE	1969	41	LAWRENCE D FISK	1600
17	KIRK D PETTY	1900	42	JOHN D GOOD	1582
18	KENNETH W GOODMAN	1899	43	SAMUEL G BASKARRAJ	1575
19	JEFFREY BYRD	1897	44	CONSTANCE WANG	1568
20	JOSHUA VARNER	1897	45	JOSHUA H LIN	1555
21	RANDY W COPE	1891	46	VICTOR LUNDY	1550
22	MICHAEL B GUTHRIE	1891	47	MARIANO RUNCO	1548
23	TIM BOND	1884	48	WILLIAM CHEN BAO	1546
24	CAESAR W LAWRENCE	1817	49	JENSON S WILHELM	1534
25	GARY W BAWGUS	1815	50	JUSTIN C PEIFER	1517

The Championship Abides

by Scott Varagona

2020: the Year of the Pandemic. Nearly every aspect of life has been turned on its head by this unfathomably disruptive force. When I think of the hardships that so many people have faced, talking about chess can sometimes feel a bit frivolous. Still, chess has helped me and countless others through many rough times. And, amid crises like this, keeping some sense of normalcy is supposed to help everyone cope. With all that in mind, I am happy to say: the 2020 Alabama State Chess Championship did indeed happen.



At first, it was up in the air how the tournament would happen. Holding the event in person was out of the question, and having it online also had drawbacks. There was also the idea of postponing the 2020 championship indefinitely until the coast was clear. But, when talking things over with ACF President Jonathan Rasberry, the one thing I was adamant about was that *the 2020 championship should take place*—in some safe and reasonable format, at some point in time.

In the end, the ACF Board made what I think was the best decision: to hold the tournament online via chess.com. The games would be USCF online-rated; there would be no prize fund and no entry fee; there would be webcams on the players at virtually all times during the games; *Zoom* meeting software would facilitate TD supervision of the players. Also, to help make the whole event more feasible for everyone under these circumstances, the time control would be sped up to Game-in-60 with an increment of 5 seconds. The faster time control was probably warranted, although it had its pros and cons. As Kirk Petty would say, "I'll be in time trouble on move one!"

Despite a few small technical difficulties here and there on the first day of the event, the players soon settled into the unusual format. The

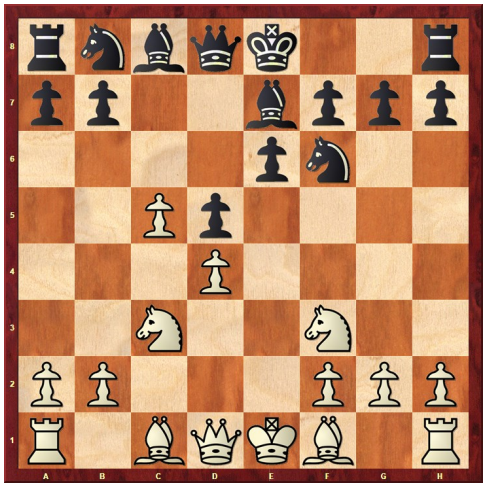
organizers/TDs—Jonathan Rasberry, Todd Guthrie, and Michael Porcelli—did an excellent job guiding everybody through this unfamiliar terrain. I really must commend them: the tournament could not have happened so successfully without their patience and hard work. Their instructions were very clear, and the players had logistical support whenever it was needed.

As for me, when I entered this tournament, my mind and body were completely overrun with work-related stress. (This is a difficult time to be a college professor.) Normally, I like to prepare vigorously for a week or two before the state championship—and that comes after several months of tournament play in the summer to help me stay sharp. This time, because of the quarantine and the overwhelming demands of my job, my tournament preparation had been basically zilch. So, despite being the defending champion, I was hardly brimming with optimism. At least I knew it would be an historic championship, and I was getting to be a part of it.

The top section, though small, was strong. There were three National Masters and a bunch of dangerous Experts and Class A players. My first-round pairing was already a tough one, as I found myself up against **Faruk Ergin**. This encounter turned out to be one of the most important games of the whole championship.

Faruk Ergin – Scott Varagona
(2069) (2270)
2020 Alabama State Championship
via Chess.com (Round 1), 9-5-2020

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.c4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e6 6.Nf3 Be7 7.c5



The last time Faruk and I played, he went for the main line with 7.cxd5 and accepted the traditional Panov-Botvinnik isolani. This time, he tries a totally different setup. White keeps his pawn structure intact and plays for queenside space, but at a price: Black gets a central pawn majority.

As this opening unfolded, I realized something strange. Normally, at the start of a round in an OTB event, you hear all sorts of little noises. Pieces

knocking against each other, clothes rustling, paper crinkling—all the sounds we take for granted when we sit in a tournament hall. But here, aside from the occasional click of my mouse button, there was *nothing*: just me alone in my living room, staring at my computer screen, in dead silence. Thank goodness I could see the other players on the *Zoom* cameras; otherwise, the sense of isolation would have been too much. It wouldn't have felt like the state championship at all.

Soon enough, this game would become so intense that any pensive thoughts about Covid-era isolation flew right out the window. I was a chess warrior locked in battle yet again…

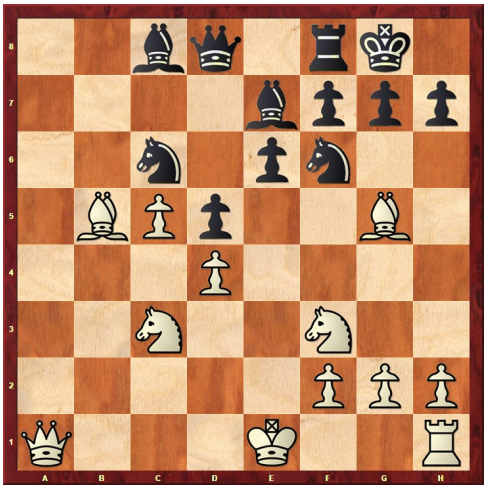
7...0–0 8.Bg5

This is even further off the beaten track. In my experience, 8.Bd3 is more standard. However, as we will see, 8.Bg5 has the benefit of connecting White's rook and queen right away.

8...b6 9.b4 a5 10.a3

This move is possible because White's queen protects the rook on a1. Now, White gets to keep his imposing queenside pawn wedge.

10...axb4 11.axb4 Rxa1 12.Qxa1 bxc5 13.bxc5 Nc6 14.Bb5



So here we are. The longer I stared at this position, the more I disliked it. Sure, Black could play 14...Bd7 and I should be able to defend, but I would honestly prefer White's position. After all, Black's bishops are hemmed in and Black's central majority lies dormant. Meanwhile, White has queenside space and a protected passed pawn to brag about.

From a big-picture point of view, we must ask ourselves: what did Black do to deserve this? He made no mistakes in the opening at all. Indeed, I played the "refutation" of 1.e4: the Caro-Kann! Black can and must demand a better fate than grim defense. Therefore…

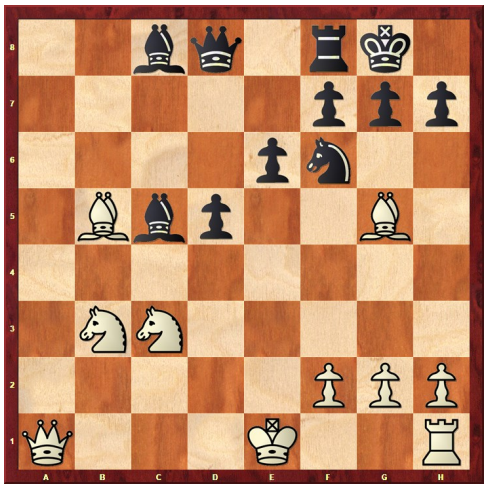
14...Nxd4!? 15.Nxd4 Bxc5

Just like that, White's pawns are

stripped away and Black's main trump, the central majority, is free to advance. White has not castled yet, by the way...

16.Nb3??

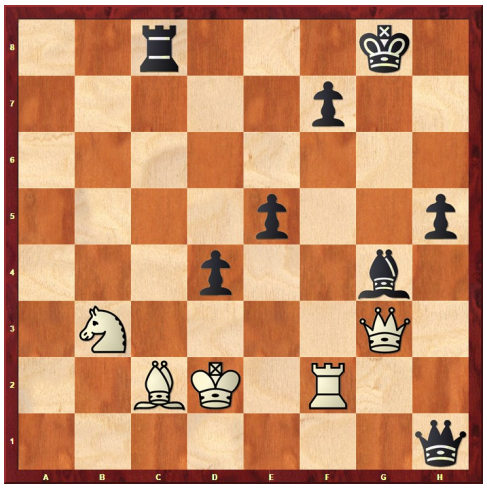
Correct was 16.Nf3!, protecting the bishop on g5. Then Black must still bear the burden of proof that the sacrifice was sound. I wasn't quite sure what I would do in the event of 16.Nf3, but I liked the look and feel of Black's position nonetheless.



16...Bxf2+! 17.Ke2 Bb6 18.Rf1 Qd6!

With three pawns and a fearsome attack for the piece, Black must be a lot better here—if not completely winning. The upcoming stream of moves is not necessarily optimal for either side, but Black remains on top until the next pivotal moment:

19.Bxf6 gxf6 20.Rf3 Qxh2 21.Nd1 Qxg2+ 22.Nf2 Bxf2 23.Rxf2 Qe4+ 24.Kd2 e5 25.Qc3 Bg4 26.Bd3 Qh1 27.Bc2 Rc8 28.Qg3 h5 29.Rxf6 d4 30.Rf2



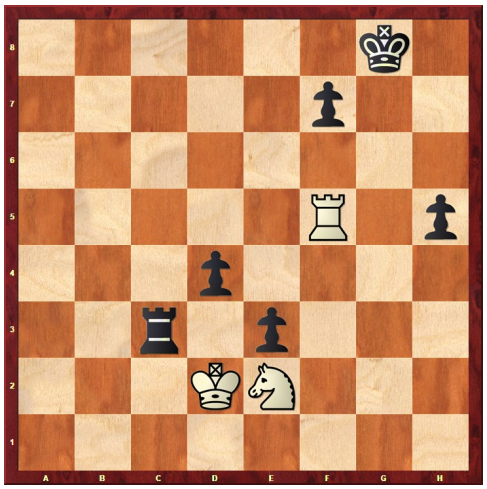
30...Qh3?

With under five minutes left on my clock and my king being a bit more exposed than I liked, I made up my mind that I wanted an endgame. A decent practical decision for sure: after all, with four passed pawns, how could I possibly lose? However, to my surprise, after 30...Qh3? the computer's evaluation changes to 0.00. Oops! Best was 30...Qc6!, when White's game is on the verge of disintegration. For example, both 31.Bb1? and 31.Bf5? fail to the computer's 31...Qh6+!, which wins immediately.

31.Qxh3 Bxh3

Regardless of the "objective truth" of the position, Black does retain good practical chances in this endgame—especially when White must figure out how to stop all these pawns with less than a minute on his clock.

32.Bf5 Rc3 33.Nc1 Bxf5 34.Rxf5 e4 35.Ne2 e3+



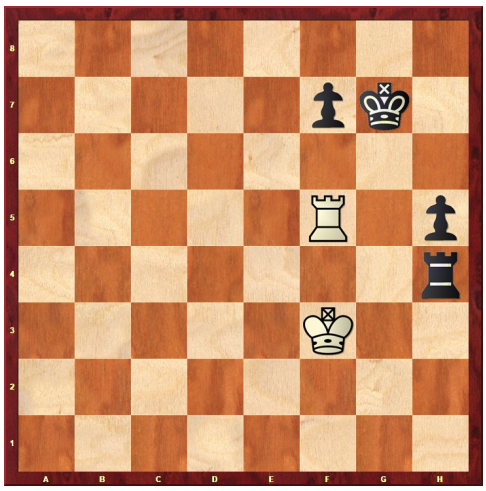
36.Kd1?

Strangely enough, the unnatural 36.Ke1! (Stockfish) was correct, because then 36...Rc4 (or 36...Rd3) runs into 37.Rf4, and White wins the d4-pawn for free. The game would then be drawn for sure.

36...Ra3!

Now White is basically forced to sacrifice a knight for two pawns. That leaves me two pawns up in a rook ending, but I cannot ride off into the sunset just yet…

37.Nxd4 Rd3+ 38.Ke2 Rxd4 39.Kxe3 Rh4 40.Kf3 Kg7



We find ourselves in the infamous f- and h-pawn rook ending. They say that such endings can often be drawn with best play, but I think the side with the pawns has good practical chances, especially in a time scramble. For example, in Carlsen-Nielsen 2014, the world champion managed to win in his typical "squeeze blood from a stone" style. Here, I just tried to play according to common sense and instinct—i.e., slowly advance the pawns, and let White be the one to wonder how the position is supposed to be drawn!

Suffice it to say that neither of us

played perfectly, but Black triumphed in the end:

41.Kg3 Rg4+ 42.Kh3 Kg6 43.Ra5 f5 44.Ra8 Kg5 45.Rg8+ Kf4 46.Rh8 h4 47.Ra8 Ke3 48.Ra3+ Kf4 49.Ra4+ Kg5 50.Ra8 Rg3+ 51.Kh2 f4 52.Rg8+ Kf5 53.Re8 Kg4 54.Rh8 h3 55.Ra8 Rg2+ 56.Kh1 Re2 57.Ra4 Kg3 58.Ra1 f3 59.Rg1+ Rg2 60.Rc1 Rh2+ 0–1

Meanwhile, the other first round games were won by the rating favorites, namely, Yury Barnakov, Brent Inman, and Tom Denton (against William D. Fox, Kirk Petty, and Jeffrey Byrd, respectively).

With White in round 2, I defeated "the Great American," **Brent Inman**, in a Classical Nimzo-Indian. When Tom Denton somehow drew a sketchy-looking pawn-down rook endgame against Barnakov, I found myself as an early frontrunner. And so, the stage was set for my showdown with **Yury Barnakov** in round 3.

Yury has put together an impressive string of victories in Alabama tournaments over the past couple of years. He had started getting the better of me as well: in our last three games together, he had beaten me twice and I had managed only one draw. So, I knew this round would probably be the make-or-break moment of my championship.

As Black, I did have something in mind to use against Barnakov's usual 1.c4—but then 1.b3!? appeared on the screen instead. (The great Larsen's Opening authority of Alabama, Stephen Adams, must be grinning ear to ear.) Barnakov played the game very positionally and patiently, with great restraint. He won the two bishops, damaged my pawn structure, and grabbed kingside space. Soon, he dominated the central light squares completely. Just when my game seemed to be slipping away, I tried a tricky knight maneuver… and Yury suddenly blundered! I won a queen for two knights and, in frenzied time pressure, gradually converted my material advantage: 0-1.

That was the luckiest of breaks. I was so grateful to win such a rough game against such a formidable foe. The only bad thing was, I simply could not calm my brain down after that game. I was still in super-drive mode hours later, trying to stop all those variations that kept swirling around and around in my mind. The same thing happened to me last year… Am I the only one who has this problem?

Enough griping; back to the action! It was time for round 4 on Sunday morning. I would face a former Alabama State Scholastic Champion, **Jeffrey Byrd**. I had never played Jeffrey before, but I knew he had an aggressive

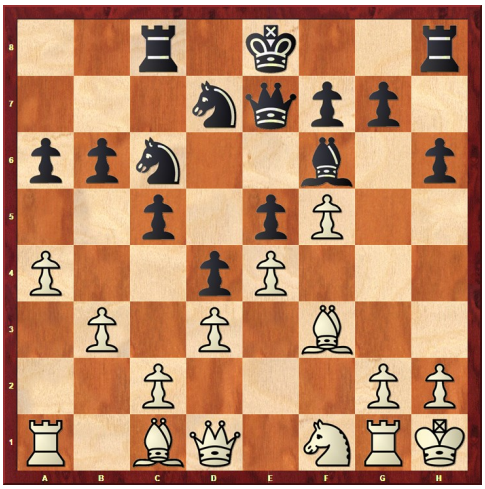
style. In a hanging pawn position typical of the Queen's Gambit Declined, I played solidly as White. Jeffrey pushed just a little too hard as Black and succumbed to a tactic on move 28. His king was too exposed in the resulting position, and soon: 1-0.

With the way I felt heading into the tournament, I could not believe things had been going this well. But, to secure first place, I still had to get through two more rounds. My next opponent would be **Tom Denton**, another legendary Alabama player. I had never played Tom before, and I had seen only a few of his games; I knew he had played 1.d4 in a brilliant game against Kyle Therrell back in 1983. But now, in 2020, Tom played 1.b3!?. I could not believe my eyes: two Larsen's Openings in the same tournament?! Maybe *all* these guys were conspiring with Stephen Adams…

Anyway, I went for 1…d5 and Tom transposed to a Bird's Opening. The center became closed, which meant play must take place on the flanks. The key strategic moment of the game came on move 17:

Tom Denton – Scott Varagona
(2053) (2270)
2020 Alabama State Championship
via Chess.com (Round 5), 9-6-2020

1.b3 d5 2.e3 c5 3.Bb2 a6 4.f4 Nc6 5.Nf3 Bg4 6.Be2 Bxf3 7.Bxf3 Rc8 8.0–0 Nf6 9.d3 d4 10.e4 e5 11.f5 Be7 12.Bc1 Nd7 13.a4 b6 14.Kh1 h6 15.Rg1 Bf6 16.Nd2 Qe7 17.Nf1



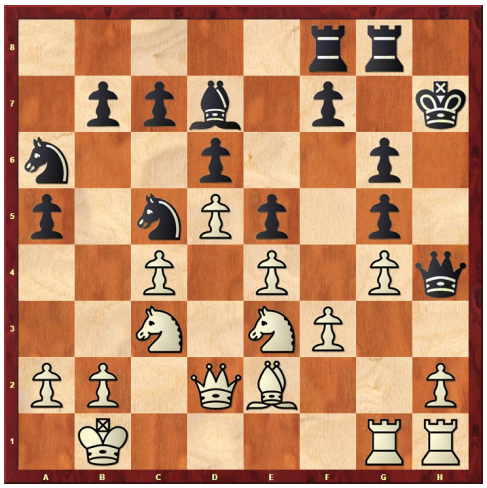
If Black castles, White will slowly expand on the kingside and attack Black's king. Why should I agree to that? I played **17…Kd8!** followed soon by …Kc7 and …Rcg8, and Black started a kingside attack of his own! I was quite proud of that idea. (My childhood chess hero, Yasser Seirawan, won some famous games thanks to such king walks. It pays to be on the lookout for them.) Long story short, my attack eventually broke through and I won material. After move 42, White resigned:

17...Kd8 18.Ba3 Bg5 19.Bc1 Kc7 20.Bg4 Bxc1 21.Qxc1 Rcg8 22.Nd2 h5 23.Bh3

Nf6 24.Qd1 g5 25.fxg6 Rxg6 26.Bf5 Ng4 27.Qf3 Qh4 28.h3 Rg7 29.Nf1 Rhg8 30.Rc1 Ne7 31.c3 Nxf5 32.exf5 Nf2+ 33.Kh2 Nxh3 34.Qxh3 Qf4+ 35.Kh1 Qxc1 36.cxd4 Rxg2 37.Rxg2 Qxf1+ 38.Kh2 Qxg2+ 39.Qxg2 Rxg2+ 40.Kxg2 cxd4 41.Kh3 Kd6 42.Kh4 e4 0–1

Time for the sixth and final round. Although I had the sole lead with 5/5, Faruk Ergin had gone on a tear after his first-round loss by winning four games in a row. That meant I still needed at least a draw in the last round to guarantee clear first place. I told myself I would be content with only a draw, but there is always that tiny voice that says, "Wouldn't it be nice to finish the tournament with a perfect score?" Be careful: that voice *might* be your fighting spirit, but it could just be a demon of pride and greed. You may regret it forever if, in pursuit of perfection, you spoil a great tournament at the very end. In these situations, it is okay to keep pushing in promising positions that entail very little risk. However, if the game starts to seem sketchy and you still have the power to force a draw, then take the bird in hand.

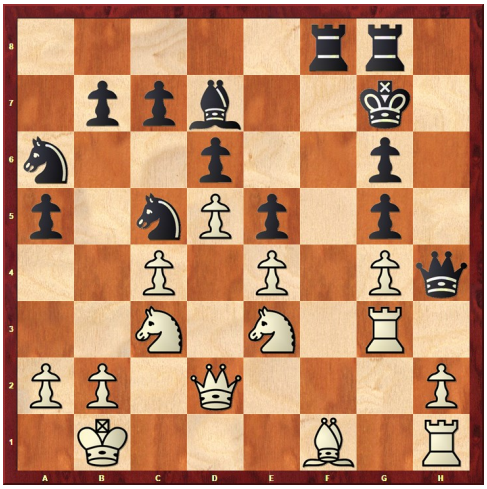
The funny thing was, I did indeed get a promising position against my round 6 opponent, **Xavier Bruni**. However, several moves into the game, something very unexpected happened. I started yawning… and I could not stop yawning. The fatigue from five stressful games had finally caught up with me. Even worse, I began to hallucinate in my calculations. It all came to a head as I was about to make my twentieth move:



Varagona-Bruni, move 20.
White to Play.

My intention was to trap Black's queen with Rg3, Bf1, and Rh3. Simple, right? But then I got to thinking: what if Black tries something desperate to stop this plan, e.g., 20.Rg3 f5 21.Bf1 fxg4 22.fxg4 Kg7.

"Take the bird in hand."



(Analysis diagram after 22…Kg7)

Am I still on track to capture Black's queen with 23.Rh3, "and wins"? I thought so. After staring bleary-eyed at this position in my head for a good while, and *almost* going for it, the truth suddenly hit me: at the end of that line, 23.Rh3?? Rxf1+! wins for Black! (I failed to notice that the queen could escape my so-called trap with ...Qf2 anyway.)

That was the last straw. I was officially so freaked out and exhausted that I could no longer trust my own calculations anymore. This game had to end, NOW. So, I started making a repetition and offered a draw, which was accepted: **20.Ng2 Qf2 21.Ne3 ½–½**. The funny thing is, on the last move, White could have still safely played for the win with either 21.Qxg5 or Xavier's suggestion, 21.h4. I do not regret my decision to take the draw, though. Sometimes, to ensure overall victory, you don't go for that extra touchdown; rather, you humbly take a knee.

In the end, Faruk Ergin won his last round game and finished the tournament with 5/6, just a half-point behind me. I was highly impressed by his grit. If he keeps this up, someday the championship will probably be his.

For now, I felt fortunate to cling to my state title for another year. The only bad thing about this win? Alabama chess history will forever remember me as "the Covid Champion." I'm not sure how to feel about that…

On a much brighter note: with this victory, I became the first person to win ten Alabama State Chess Champion titles. I still cannot seem to fathom that. Many Alabama chess players who I respect deeply (and who have worked very hard on their game) only have one or two titles, or even none. So, how I ended up with *ten* is beyond me. All the work I have poured into chess has been rewarded far more than I deserved. I am truly grateful to the Alabama chess community for all the opportunities it has given me.

Let us hope that, next year, our state championship tradition will continue yet again—but under slightly more normal circumstances. ■

Recent Results

From uschess.org

2020 Alabama Quick Chess Championship

OPEN

Alabama Quick Chess Champion: **Isaac Snow**, 4 points
2nd place: Brent Inman, 3.5 points

U1600

U1600 Quick Champion: **Doug Strout**, 4 points
2nd place: Shawn Choi, 3 points

2020 Alabama Blitz Chess Championship

Alabama Blitz Chess Champion: **Joe Jurjevich**, 5 points
2nd place: Aaron DeCord, 3.5 points

2020 Alabama State Chess Championship

CHAMPIONSHIP (USCF Online Rated)

Alabama State Chess Champion: **Scott Varagona**, 5.5 points
2nd place: Faruk Ergin, 5 points

U1800 (USCF Online Quick-Rated)

U1800 State Co-Champions: **Victor Lundy, Samuel J. Gilliland, & Nikhita Chintareddy**, 4 points

U1200 (USCF Online Quick-Rated)

U1200 State Champion: **Hartwell K. Forstman**, 5 points
2nd place: Sohan R. Mynampally, 4 points

Complete results for all these events may be found here:
Quick Championship: http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?202008222582
Blitz Championship: http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?202008222592
State Championship: http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?202009067192 ■

MCCL Halloween Chess Tournament

by Ranae Bartlett

The Madison City Chess League made history on Halloween hosting its first outdoor chess tournament on the new turf field at Madison City Schools Stadium. 77 students registered to play in both rated and non-rated sections. **Superintendent Dr. Ed Nichols** opened the tournament declaring, "It's Chess time in Madison City!"

Although a Quick Rating was established for many, the tournament itself was only one part of a joyful day for the entire chess family. Beautiful weather and music from Harry Potter greeted participants as they entered the stadium. Candy prizes and Halloween medals were awarded with special contests in between each round of the tournament. The Halloween Dance-Off was a highlight and allowed us to see some impressive moves. Kids also enjoyed running around in the end zone while families sat in their lawn chairs on the edge of the field.

Complete tournament results can be found here:

https://madisonchess.com/tournaments/2020-halloween-chess-tournament/standings

Round 1. Photo by Scott Wilhelm.

The USCF tournament report for the Rated sections can be found here:

http://www.uschess.org/msa/XtblMain.php?202010317152-16907407

Todd Guthrie was the Chief TD.

We observed the safety protocols of Madison City Schools, and all students wore masks as they played. We used an ion sprayer to disinfect the chess sets and boards in between rounds that dried really quickly, and had hand sanitizer at every table. The kids had a blast and really missed seeing each other.

Winners:

K-12: **Xavier Bruni**, 4 points

K-8: **Marek R. Fries & Swetha S. Jakka**, 3.5 points

K-5: **Jethro M. Ai Jones**, 4 points

K-3: **Kylie E. Zou**, 4 points

K-5 (non-rated): **James Hoogstra & Milan Malak**, 3 points

K-2 (non-rated): **Erin McCormick**, 3.5 points. ■

Top left & top right: K-3 Section. Bottom right: Non-rated K-2 Section. Photos by Scott Wilhelm.

How to Slay the Dragon

by Charles Anthony

Bobby Fischer thought that he had it all figured out about how to defeat the Sicilian Dragon. He would just sacrifice a pawn or two on the g- and h-files and proceed to win. Nevertheless, the Dragon was, and still is, my favorite defense. I'm no Fischer, but I'm about to show you how to slay the Dragon. This game with Roy Alexander is from 12-9-1982. Enjoy!

Charles Anthony – Roy Alexander
Fayette Chess Club, 12-9-1982

1.e4 c5 2.Nc3

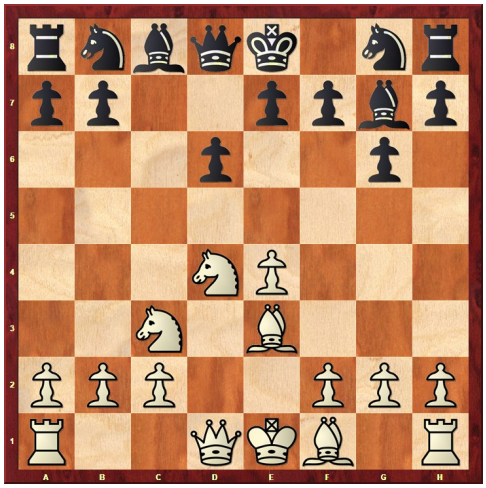
Irregular move order for the Dragon.

2...g6

The Accelerated Dragon. Now Black's bishop will be critical to the kingside defense, and also becomes the focus of White's attack.

3.Nf3 Bg7 4.d4 cxd4 5.Nxd4 d6 6.Be3

Starting a Yugoslav Attack.



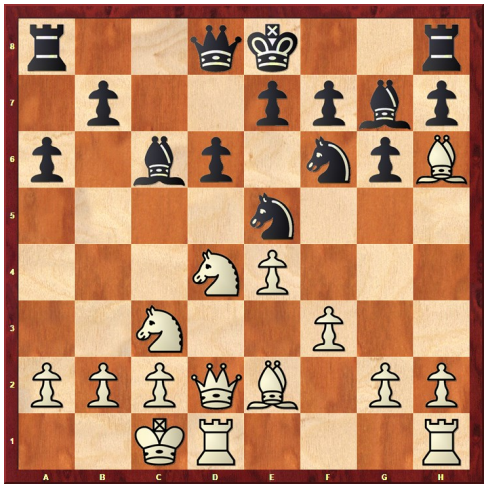
6...Nf6 7.Qd2

Preparing to castle queenside before the pawn-storm attack on the kingside.

7...Nc6 8.Bb5 Bd7 9.f3 a6 10.Be2 Ne5

White is poised to castle on either side, but this attack requires the king to get out of the way on the queenside.

11.0–0–0 Bc6 12.Bh6



Time to weaken the black squares on the kingside by exchanging the bishops.

12...0–0 13.g4

The pawn storm begins. This is how you slay the Dragon.

13...Qc8 14.h4 Re8

Now the black bishop can retreat to h8 without giving up the exchange.

15.Bxg7 Kxg7

The strategy of weakening the black squares is realized.

16.h5

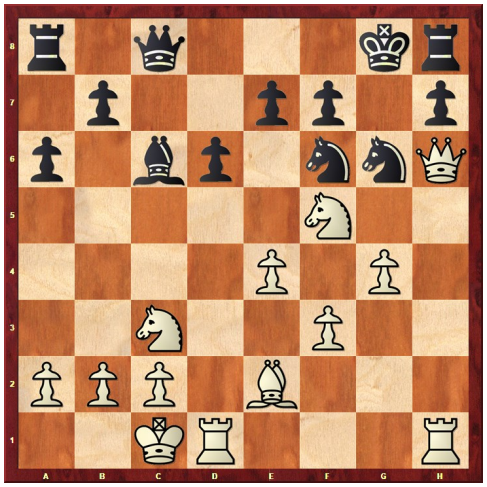
The onslaught of the pawns continues.

16...Rh8 17.hxg6

Pawn exchanges open lines for the pieces to attack the king.

17...Nxg6 18.Qh6+ Kg8 19.Nf5

Threatening checkmate with the queen at g7.



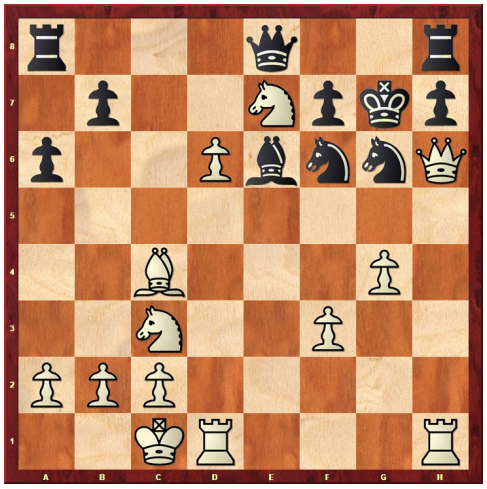
19...Qf8 20.Qg5 Qe8 21.Bc4

Bearing down on f7.

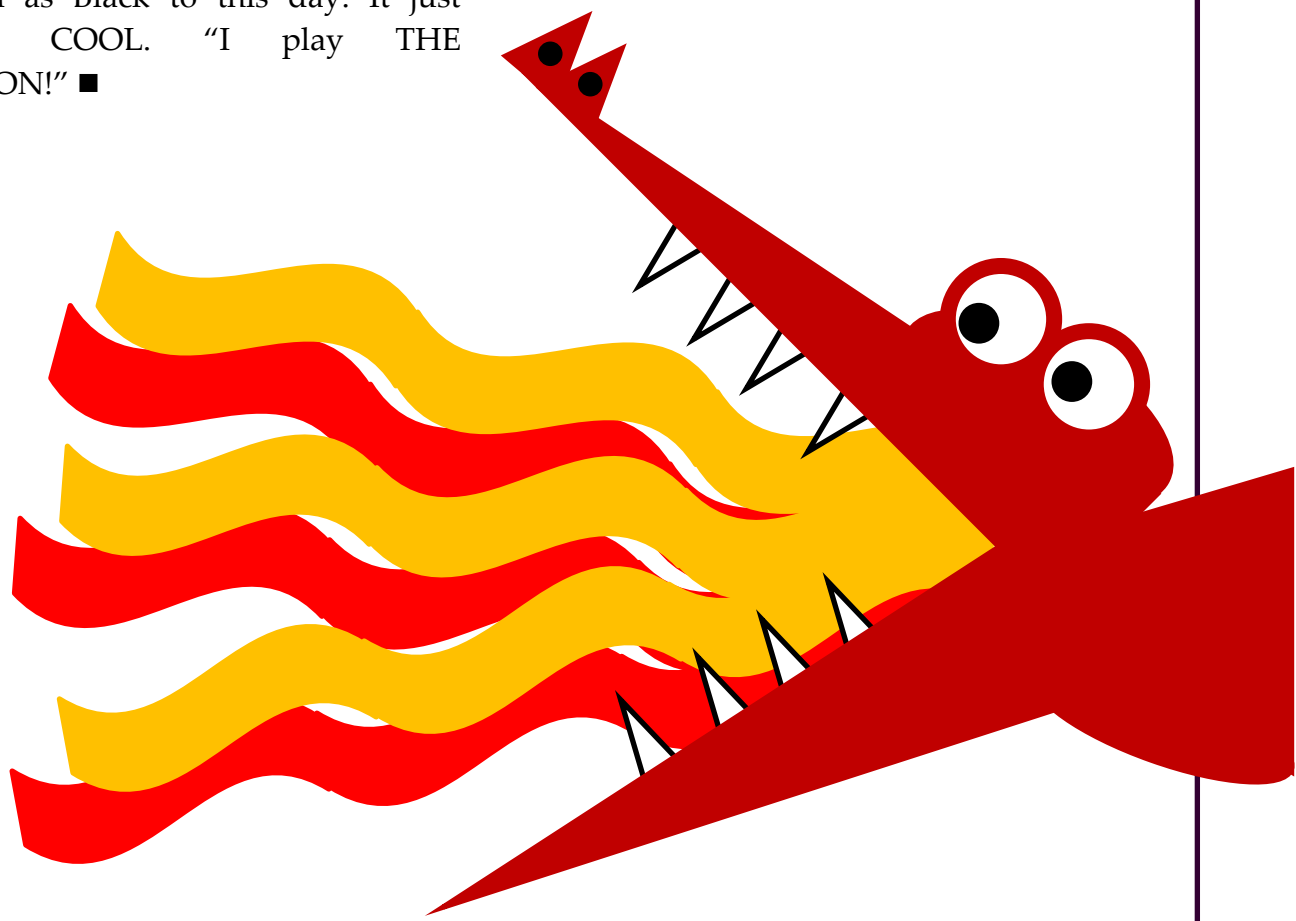
21...d5 22.exd5 Bd7 23.d6 Be6 24.Nxe7+!

Black cannot capture with the pinned knight.

24...Kg7 25.Qh6#!!



And THAT is how you slay the Dragon! But I still love to play the Dragon as Black to this day. It just sounds COOL. "I play THE DRAGON!" ■



The English Horned Frog Returns

by Doug Strout

This is an English Horned Frog that occurred during a USCF blitz on chess.com with time control Game/3 + 2 second increment. My opponent is Mohamed Elshazly of Indiana. Ratings are USCF Online Blitz Ratings. Elshazly is rated expert in USCF regular.

M. Elshazly – D.L. Strout
(1768) (1433)
US Chess 3|2 Blitz Chess.com
(Round 1), 11-25-2020

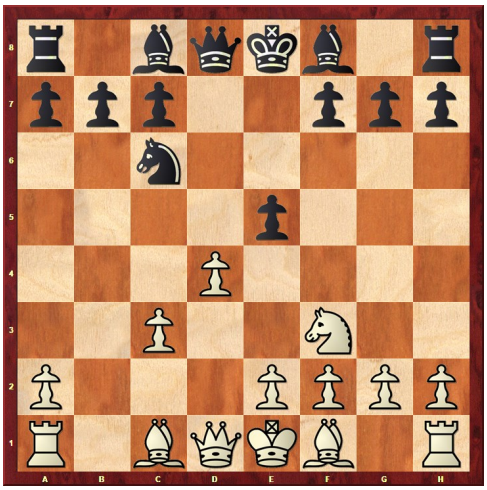
1.c4 d5

1...d5 has become my go-to versus the English.

2.cxd5 Nf6 3.Nc3[1] Nxd5 4.Nf3 Nxc3 5.bxc3 Nc6

A line of simplification that wipes out early development by both sides.

6.d4 e5



Gambit play is not my forte, but I offer a pawn to set up a queen trade with removal of my opponent's right to castle.

7.d5 Ne7 8.e4 Ng6 9.h4 Bd6 10.h5 Ne7

...Nf4 was another possibility here, but I like my pawn at e5 against the opponent's pawn center.

11.Be3 h6 12.Bd3 0–0 13.0–0

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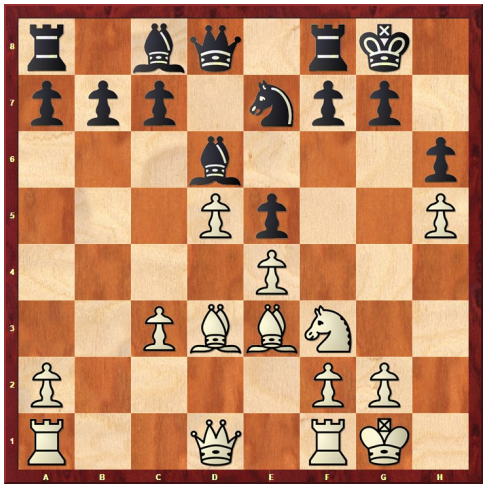
1. *Interesting would be 3.e4 c6 (not 3…Nxe4?? 4.Qa4+) 4.dxc6 Nxc6, when Black gambits a pawn for quick development and control of the dark squares. Somebody in Alabama needs to play 1.c4 against Doug so he can test out this idea! -Ed*



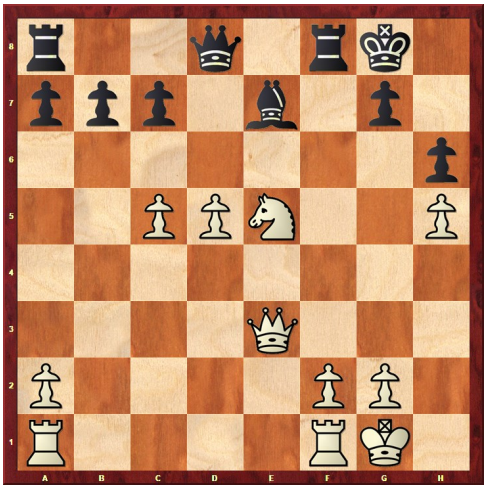
Both sides finally get castled.

13...f5 14.exf5 Bxf5 15.c4 Bxd3[2] 16.Qxd3

I attacked his pawn center and got more simplification. I do have a bishop stuck pretending to be a pawn in my structure.

16...Nf5 17.c5 Nxe3 18.Qxe3 Be7 19.Nxe5

The opponent wins a pawn and has a nice-looking outpost on g6.



19...Bf6[3] 20.Ng6

My opponent offers up a fresh round of simplification and immediately burns the knight posted to g6.

20...Bxa1 21.Nxf8 Qxf8 22.Rxa1 Re8

Rook development with tempo against opponent's queen.

23.Qd4 Qf6 24.Qxf6 gxf6

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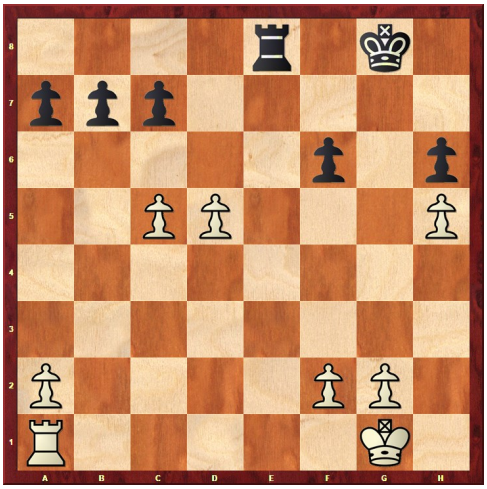
2. *Although 15...e4 does not quite win a full piece because of 16.c5, that route still looks favorable for Black. -Ed*
3. *I think Black can get away with taking the pawn right back with 19…Qxd5 because 20.Ng6 is answered by 20…Bxc5, gaining a tempo off of White's queen. -Ed*

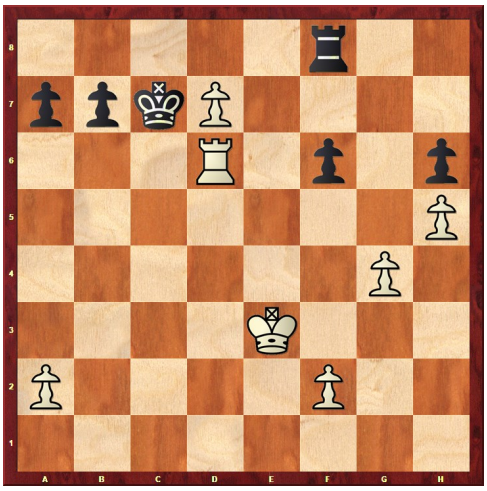


Yes, I did that on purpose. I have two isolated pawns now, but the queens are traded, my rook is already posted on the open file, and neither isolated pawn is on an open file. Also, look at the queenside pawn structure. If he pushes d6 cxd6 cxd6, he gets a passer I can stop, and I would have a&b-vs-a to create an outside passer later.

25.Rd1 Kf7 26.Kf1 Re5 27.d6 cxd6 28.cxd6 Ke8 29.d7+ Kd8

See? d7 is toast, and I still have 2-vs-1 on the queenside.

30.g4 Re7 31.Rd6 Rf7 32.Ke2 Rf8 33.Ke3 Kc7



As long as d8 is double-covered, I can lean on his rook a little.

34.Rd4[4] Rd8 35.Kf4 Rxd7 36.Rc4+ Kd8 37.Kf5 Ke7 38.Re4+ Kf7 39.Rb4 b6

My 2-on-1 queenside is safe and his 3-on-2 kingside can't advance. "I'm looking good for at least a draw here" is probably what I was thinking at the time.

40.a4 Rd5+

A rook move winning space for my king.

41.Kf4 Ke6 42.f3 Rd6 43.Rc4 a6 44.Ke3 b5 45.axb5 axb5

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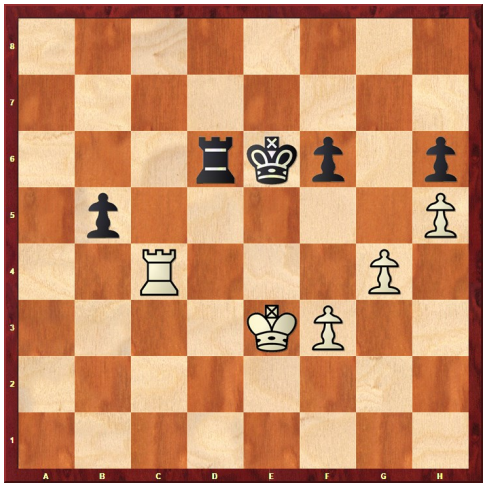
4. *White missed 34.d8Q+! Rxd8 35.Rxf6. -Ed*

There's my outside passer.



46.Rb4 Rb6

The rook parks behind the outside passer.

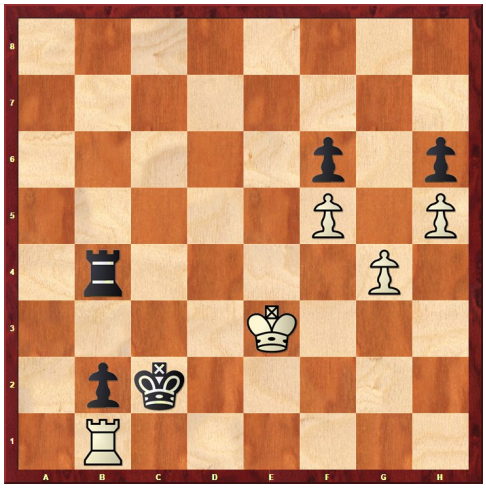
47.f4 Ke7 48.Ke4 Ke6 49.Kd4 Rb8 50.f5+ Kd6 51.Ke4

Where's the white king going here? His 3-on-2 is stopped, and he has given my king a great square.

51...Kc5 52.Rb1 b4 53.Rc1+ Kd6 54.Kd4 b3 55.Rb1 b2 56.Ke4 Rb4+ 57.Kf3 Ke5

Another rook move wins space for the black king.

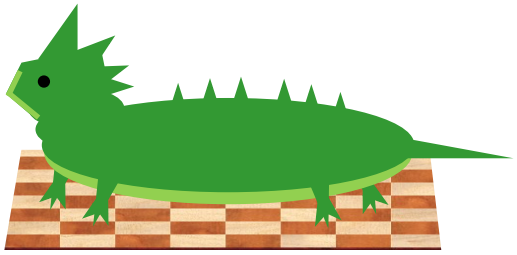
58.Re1+ Kd4 59.Rb1 Kc3 60.Ke3 Kc2



61.Re1 b1Q 62.Rxb1 Rxb1

That's it. It's over. Win for black. All white can do now is attempt to win or draw on the clock.

63.Ke4 Rb5 64.Kd4 Kd2 65.Kc4 Ra5 66.Kb4 Re5 67.Kc4 Re4+ 68.Kd5 Re5+ 69.Kd6 Ke3 70.Kd7 Kf4 71.Kd6 Kxg4 72.Kd7 Kxf5 73.Kd6 Kg5 74.Kd7 Re1 75.Kd6 f5 76.Kd7 f4 77.Kd6 f3 78.Kd5 f2 79.Kd4 f1Q 80.Kd5 Qd3+ 81.Kc5 Rc1+ 82.Kb4 Rc4+ 83.Kb5 Qb3+ 84.Ka5 Ra4# 0–1. ■



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Upcoming Tournaments

Important Note: All in-person tournaments listed here will be conducted with COVID precautions. Players should take note of any special pandemic-related rules stated on tournament fliers. See www.alabamachess.org for updates on these and other events.

January 9	**Dothan Open**	**Dothan, AL**
January 16	**Evangel 2021 Open**	**Montgomery, AL**
February 27	**Tom Nard Memorial VII**	**Montgomery, AL**

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Alabama.Chess.Editor@gmail.com

Games in .pgn format are strongly preferred.

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